INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL ONLINE OF HUMANITIES (IJOHMN)

ISSN: 2395 – 5155
Volume -I Issue-II February 2015

Usage of Simulations and Language Games in ESL Classes

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Introduction

As we all know that the need to access information continues to grow exponentially and institutions cannot remain as mere venues for the transmission of a prescribed set of syllabus from teacher to student over a fixed period of time, rather they must promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills as a continuous process throughout life span. It has been rightly said by a futurist, „The illiterate of the 21st century —Will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn & relearn". Hence, the traditional lock-step approach to language teaching is rapidly becoming inadequate in modem teaching-learning process (Lee: 1965). It"s a

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recent mandatory call that once unidirectional teaching methodology must be transformed to two way learning process and learner centered as well.

This is possible only with interactive classes. But even today ESL learners‟ reluctance to speak English in the classroom is a problem found in almost every language learning environment. Many students are afraid to communicate in English for fear of committing mistakes and in turn getting laughed at by their peers.

Consequently, students have fewer opportunities to learn from speaking practices and methodologies. Even worse, in a mixed-ability set up, working with students who are reluctant to maintain and extend conversations also limits already skilled students‟ opportunities for language use. Getting such students to speak English is one Herculean task for the teachers of English. More effective and innovative teaching techniques are required for tackling this complex language problem that is prevalent in the English classes of every rural set up. Some strategies beyond urging students to „speak English‟ are repeatedly called for. Yet, there is no authentic solution found subsequently. So every

English teacher is pre-occupied with these persisting questions, „How can we challenge our students to speak and to participate‟? „How can we motivate students who are not able to visualize the importance of the English language in the everyday world and subsequently do not see the need to master it well‟?

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Mine is a humble effort through this paper that aims to provide answers for our queries stated above with a range of techniques to encourage reluctant students to speak the target language in the classroom.

The Needs & Ways of getting ESL Students involve in learning English

It is apparent that the English language is certainly more than the prescribed texts and objective questions. Therefore, a student getting a distinction for English in a public exam does not mean that he has caught the passion for learning English. Now- a- days, students‟ ability to put forth their ideas by means of effective communication is expected apart from scores that just test their writing ability. This new area of focus, known as communicative competence, leads language teachers to seek task-oriented activities that engage their students in creative language use. Trying to make our classes interactive can be challenging but it remains essential because the concerns over educational relevance and quality coexist with the imperative of expanding educational opportunities to everyone not excluding those who feel vulnerable to use English both inside and outside classrooms.

In order to get learners involved in the language class and to ensure active participation of every learner, certain techniques could be applied. The best ways of getting them drawn into the language class is through Simulations and Language Activities. Also they are fantastic materials for the language teachers to use with young learners because of their unlimited benefits. Every teacher and student is creative if he is given the opportunity, time and support to express that

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creativity. Simulations and Activities for language teaching can be based on everyday materials. We should not be afraid to try out unconventional tools based on personal experience in the classroom. In this way, lecturers can incorporate their creative skills into the teaching of oral skills.

Students when allowed to explore their creative skills find speaking in the English language

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interesting, relevant and productive. Creative and imaginative activities help alleviate problems that hinder language learning. (Di Pietro, 1987).

Task-based teaching using Simulations

Students need opportunities to be active participants in tasks that require them to practice communication with their teachers, peers, and others. It involves shared experiences in a particular situation. Simulation is a kind of technique that consists of the scenario of role-play. A simulation is similar to role play except that in a simulation the participants are free to take their own decisions and are not directed in any way by constraints laid down on a role play. The use of simulation techniques has been reported to be of high motivational value by researchers (Chauham, 1979). This is one of the most distinctive features of simulation which makes it acceptable at all levels of teaching because if any teaching technique succeeds in creating motivation in learners all other problems may be drastically reduced (Chauham, 1979: 127). The use of simulation techniques where students are allowed to project themselves into new classroom roles helps to improve classroom dialogue, active participation and transfer of learning (Watson 1986).Through active discussion, students discover how the language works. Not just that, they are able to sort and order the information gathered and relate it to the lesson. The teacher in all possible ways guides the students but it is the students who actually discover for themselves how they can effectively carry out the acquired information that they received from simulation activities. In addition, you can build in opportunities for success rather than failure by ensuring that tasks are at an appropriate level of difficulty and that every lesson contains some “take-away” value, something that helps

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students leave the class knowing that they have moved forward in their learning. This could result in students‟ growing sense of confidence in writing a paragraph, in using some appropriate expressions to communicate with friends and neighbors, in understanding useful vocabulary items, and so on.

Moreover, Simulation activities are done in groups or pairs. This further eliminates anxiety and encourages teamwork. If the outcome is good, the team feels proud. If mistakes are made, they learn out of it. Other than enjoyment, students are more motivated to speak and to come out of their „shells‟. They gain more confidence in speaking the target language and even if they stammer and stumble their team members will help them in expressing themselves. Thus, working in groups gives students greater opportunities in the use of target language when compared to a traditional teacher talk lesson. To quote Davies (1990), discussion sessions would certainly increase the amount of individual student talking time. Students also practice valuable language used in negotiation, argument, expressing opinion, compromise, agreement, and disagreement. This task also provides students with an opportunity to make a formal talk, determine an advertising message, and present their concept in a creative framework. So to prepare our students to speak the target language competently and go on learning it independently after they have left the language classroom we need to provide them with simulation practice.

Sample Simulation Activities

The participants in Simulation activities will have a situation to work with and that will state who they are, what they want to do, and what their attitude is. If the preparation gets over, the participants will be clear about how they should respond, although there may be some degree of

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choice. However, in general, the task for the participants will make them follow the instructions and try to use appropriate language as per the demands of the situations like those listed out below.

1. Hotel English: A Simulation Role-play

   Pupils practice the skills to enter a hotel and book a room. In this hotel English lesson, students are introduced to the etiquette associated with entering hotel. Pupils role-play ways in which people interact in a hotel setting. Students work with partners to practice this skill and discuss opinions and preferences.

2. A Simulation for Business English Students

   Students are introduced to business concepts through authentic materials and modeling. They design a new product and name it. They create advertising for their newly created product.

3. Different Than Me

   Students role play with props and illustrate the difficulties of having a disability. For this disabilities lesson, students are fitted with devices used by disabled people to understand the problems and frustration they face daily.

4. Step Into the Real World - Careers & Service Learning

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Students research, analyze and study a variety of resources and activities to broaden their horizons on careers and service learning through classroom, community and career activities. They scan all possible choices they have at their disposal out in the real world.

5. Cell Phones Create Dangers

Students research what laws relate to cell phones. They interview local law enforcement personnel to find out if cell phones have caused accidents. Students survey classmates to determine how many talk on their phones when driving. They write an article on the findings. Usage of Language Games in English Classes

This section considers the reasons why games serve as excellent communicative activities. The use of games can be a powerful language learning tool. On the surface, the aim of all language games is for students to „use the language"; however, during game play learners also use the target language to persuade and negotiate their way to desired results. This process involves the productive and receptive skills simultaneously.

Games are simple structured activities which may involve little language but are meaningful to students and involve the whole self (cognitively and emotionally), thus creating strong associations with the language used (Fleta, 2009). Games offer students a fun-filled and relaxing learning atmosphere. After learning and practicing new vocabulary, students have the opportunity to use language in a nonstressful way (Uberman 1998). While playing games, the learners' attention is on the message, not on the language. Rather than pay attention to the correctness of linguistic forms, most participants will do all they can to win. This eases the fear of

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negative evaluation, the concern of being negatively judged in public, and which is one of the main factors inhibiting language learners from using the target language in front of other people (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986). In a game-oriented context, anxiety is reduced and speech fluency is generated--thus communicative competence is achieved.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that the competitive activity should be taken as a mere amusing activity just to finish the class time, neither be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. In contrast, games should be used correctly in any part of the class in order to achieve a goal, and should stimulate students to develop and improve the demanded abilities towards the learning process.

Games are also motivating. They introduce an element of competition into languagebuilding activities. This provides valuable impetus to a purposeful use of language (Prasad 2003). In other words, these activities create a meaningful context for language use. The competitive ambiance also makes learners concentrate and think intensively during the learning process, which enhances unconscious acquisition of inputs. Most students who have experienced game-oriented activities hold positive attitudes towards them (Uberman 1998). An action research conducted by Huyen and Nga (2003), students said that they liked the relaxed atmosphere, the competitiveness, and the motivation that games brought to the classroom. On the effectiveness of games, teachers in Huyen&Nga's (2003)reported that action research reported that their students seem to learn more quickly and retain the learned materials better in a stress-free and comfortable environment. They can participate fully in all the activities without being pressured to produce language.

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Thus, Game is one of the basic communicative methods in language education. Lozano"s Suggestopedia is a perfect illustration of a game based education that develops hidden human reserves and creative skills. Finally language games create a bond between the teacher and their students. In short, if used properly by the teacher, games are excellent ways whereby learners have fun and at the same time acquire a language. So, it can be said that English language games actually give students a reason to communicate, and a context for speaking practice.

Some Sample Language Games

In this article, I also share my experience of some interesting games for which I received good response and feedback and also their application in the language classroom.

1. Spelling Contest

First, a large class has to be divided into 2 teams. Then the teacher says a word or a sentence depending on the level for the students to spell. Students should spell these correctly with not even one mistake.

The team that has more points is the winner.

2. Call My Bluff

All the students in the class should be asked to say 3 sentences about themselves one by one & the twist of the game is among those 3 sentences that every student addresses, one should be a lie and the rest of the class can find out to listen to with an interest to guess out the lie.

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3. Create Your Own Similes

a) Present a few similes and the sample sentences to the class. Write the sentences with underline. Ex. The baby's skin was as white as snow. Finishing up the project by himself, the boy was as proud as a peacock.

b) Prepare flashcards with one adjective on each. Students pick out one card in turn and create similes by using the adjective on the card. Emphasize that unique ideas are welcome.

Facilitator shouldn't be judgmental, and accept any similes as long as they are logical. Ex. as big as Mt. Fuji / as soft as a cotton candy.

Students compare their ideas and discuss which ones are interesting or funny. If time allows discuss the usage and effectiveness of the simile. This activity fosters students‟ creativity and encourages their active participation in the lesson.

4. Hangman

The class can be divided into two teams. On the blackboard, draw spaces for the number of letters in a word. Let the players guess the letters of the word alternating between the teams. If a letter in the word is guessed correctly, the teacher writes it into the correct space. If a letter is guessed which is not in the word, the teacher draws part of the man being hanged. The teams which can guess the word first receives a point and extend the number of rounds as per the time limit and the winner is the maximum scoring team.

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Conclusion

As language teachers, we are always foraging for ideas to keep the class „afloat" in the sea of indifference and passivity. Although it is difficult, the ESL instructor can indeed help students develop the motivation to speak English and create the available situations to practice it and move students toward acquisition of their second language with the help of the above mentioned taskbased activities.Using task-based learning to teach English does not fall into the well-tried comfort zone of traditional teaching. The average teacher feels comfortable with the prescribed textbook. This unfortunately denies students the opportunity to immerse themselves in the English language.

It is necessary that teachers try using other materials as a teaching resource.

According to Genesee (1987) "activity-based approach provides opportunities for students to experience a much wider range of speech events and to use a much wider range of speech acts than is possible in conventional medium-oriented classes in which the language is taught as a subject, or even in message-oriented classes in which regular content is taught through L2." Therefore, using strategies such as Simulations and Language Games help students to recognize the value of the use of English and setting up situations in which it seems almost necessary to do so will keep students focused on using English in their ESL class—perhaps the only time they will have extended practice in their target language.

As explained in the paper, and despite the fact that results showed improvements in students learning skills, however, this is not a proposal for replacement of traditional education. Rather,

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interactive enhanced learning can provide a very useful alternative for traditional education especially in situations where it is not applicable to train through traditional methods. The introduction of task-based learning into the classroom may bring about the fear that „there is no teaching going on". Butin fact, not using the prescribed textbook for an English lesson occasionally is a refreshing change.So Language teachers should try to adopt more practical simulation techniques and game tactics to make language learning learner-centered.

The language of communication is real-life or authentic and un textbook-like in design. By incorporating hands-on projects into their everyday language classroom, teachers are preparing students to enter the real world. Teachers can create a non-threatening environment to encourage both shy and talkative students to participate. Thus, these strategies cum tools create opportunities for learners to get the interest and motivation, facilitate the process of teaching and learning and convert language education into real intellectual and emotional experience developing student personality as a whole. There is need therefore, to conduct more studies on the suitability of simulation techniques and game practices for teaching different topics and concepts in language.

Teaching English will never be an uphill battle if every teacher tries to make the difference.

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